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The Archaeology of State Formation in Scotland

Stephen T. Driscoll

> The kings of Scotia and Scotland stamped unity upon four or five disparate peoples north of the Tweed and Solway; yet the precosity of a single kingdom of Scotia or Alba in the mid-ninth century . . . seems to excite little comment . . . The only Celtic realm with well formed and independent political institutions at the beginning of the 'high middle ages' was that with apparently the smallest cultural heritage, Scotland'. (Duncan 1975, 110)

> 'thanages . . . were all situated in those eastern districts which formed originally the seat of Pictish Tribes, and afterwards fell under the dynasty of the Scottish race'. (Skene 1890, 277)

Historical explanation and archaeological initiative

Perhaps the biggest issue yet to be directly addressed by Scottish archaeologists is the formation of their state. Although Duncan's comment refers to contemporary silence, it is equally apt for today. What passes for historical debate on the topic serves to make plain that as far as text-bound historians are concerned, the process of Scottish state formation remains a paradox if not a mystery. And yet Skene had a century ago identified the key to the mystery, a key which he was unable to employ due to the limitations of the documentary resources.

In this paper I would like to outline some of the ways in which archaeology can take the initiative in this endeavour. It is a way which requires considerable integration of historical and archaeological scholarship. Its strength is that it provides a freedom from the constraints which are inherent in the approaches confined to documentary sources or to artifact studies. Although this paper is not intended as a critique of historical methods and attitudes, its brevity inevitably introduces a polemical tone to the discussion on the value of integrated historical and archaeological endeavour (see Driscoll 1988a for fuller discussion of the problem). Therefore, it is worth stressing at the outset that this is a constructive attempt to build upon the framework provided by Scottish historians and to suggest how the

archaeological evidence can be deployed to explore the crucial questions surrounding the formation of the Scottish state.

A key methodological problem has been to rely too much on political texts for evidence of institutional development. Leaving aside the ideological questions of elitist history, strict documentary history is limiting as an approach because it places too little priority on the structural developments in society which gave rise to the insitutions of the state. These are not to be seen primarily in the King Lists (Anderson 1980, 80), nor are they to be discovered by charting the ebb and flow of military fortunes as noted in the Annals (Anderson 1922; Smyth 1984). Rather they are to be discovered in social and economic arrangements as revealed in the patterns of landholding and agricultural exploitation, as illuminated by comparison with how states elsewhere have evolved, and by asking questions of the archaeology which texts cannot address.

There are significant reasons for discussing the political and ideological process of state formation in archaeological terms. Firstly, it provides a materialist perspective which is missing from the text-based histories. The study of early medieval Scotland gains a reciprocal advantage from considering state formation, because the 'big process' provides a framework for otherwise poorly connected groups of facts about brooch type, interlace styles, fortification techniques, quern types and so on. Moreover, without placing the archaeological evidence within such a framework it is deprived of political resonance and provides no connection with contemporary Scotland.

Areas of institutional development

Three areas of social and political activity stand out as crucial for the study of the growth of the Scottish state. The first two have long been recognised: centres of royal authority such as Forteviot or Scone, or centres of religious authority, such as Abernethy or St Andrews. But little attention has been devoted to the third, the structure of settlement and the pattern of land control. These are, of course, not exclusive categories, because places of secular authority included religious elements (pagan and christian), abbeys were great landlords, and local centres of production could develop into centres of regional importance. In fact to divide the early medieval world into three estates may be convenient, but is a distortion. There were intimate connections between the three areas I have isolated, the most prevalent of which was the way in which social relations were forged to maintain control over agricultural production. There are three contemporary historians who can be identified with these particular areas: Leslie Alcock with centres of secular authority, Gordon Donaldson with the Church, and Geoffrey Barrow with the organisation and control of land.

As indicated above the major methodological problem surrounding Scottish state formation is to integrate two academically divided bodies of knowledge: texts and material culture. My starting assumption is that

power in medieval Scotland flowed from the land. Consequently the basis for understanding state institutions is an understanding of how land was controlled and how agricultural production was managed. At this most fundamental level it is the patterns of landscape organisation that we must seek to understand, that is we must seek to produce a coherent image of the early medieval landscape with its attendant social practices and political institutions.

In studying the settlement evidence I have followed two paths in an attempt to develop the latent historical meanings. One has been to combine the archaeological sites with the known historical geography derived from the contemporary sources, medieval texts and place-name studies. The other approach has been to use the historical texts to generate a systematic model with which we can interpret the historical evidence for settlement.

The first method has a credible track record. It has been used by antiquarians and modern historical scholars to locate sites of interest and to enhance their documentary findings. It is certainly the appropriate method to begin the study of major centres of the religious and secular authority. Alcock's campaign to uncover the early historic fortifications of Scotland may be taken as a model of how to proceed (1981; 1988), since he considers sites which are mentioned explicitly in annalistic sources as well as more oblique references embedded in hagiographic narratives. The method has even proved useful for providing cropmark sites with historical contexts; see for instance Alcock (1982) and Anderson (1980, 203–4) on Forteviot. The obvious limitation here is that there is no way to compensate for lacunae in the survival of historically recorded names: sites like Restenneth, Clatchard Craig and Burghead, although important Pictish centres, are consigned to an historic limbo.

It is the second approach which I wish to concentrate upon because it attempts to account for all settlement, not simply those sites prominent (or lucky) enough to have entered the documentary record. By drawing on what evidence there is for pre-feudal administrative systems and social relations, it is possible to propose a model which accounts for the social hierarchy and settlement correlates. The sources of our knowledge about Pictish society and administration are late and difficult to use, but not impossible. It is this second path, marked out by Skene and improved by Barrow, that appears the most promising because it allows us to use one of the most important archaeological assets: aerial photography.

There is a neat coincidence of the newest and least exploited archaeological resource and the location of the key economic resources for the early medieval period. The great number of cropmark sites to have been recorded since the early 1970s provides an opportunity for the first time to obtain geographically and socially representative information about past settlement systems in eastern Scotland. The importance of this resource can be simply illustrated by comparing the settlements recorded as upstanding monuments, which in Strathearn are all hill-forts, to those recorded as aerial photographs up to 1984 (Figs 5.1 and 5.2) (Driscoll 1987, 204–54). Similarly striking patterns have been revealed by Macinnes' comparative

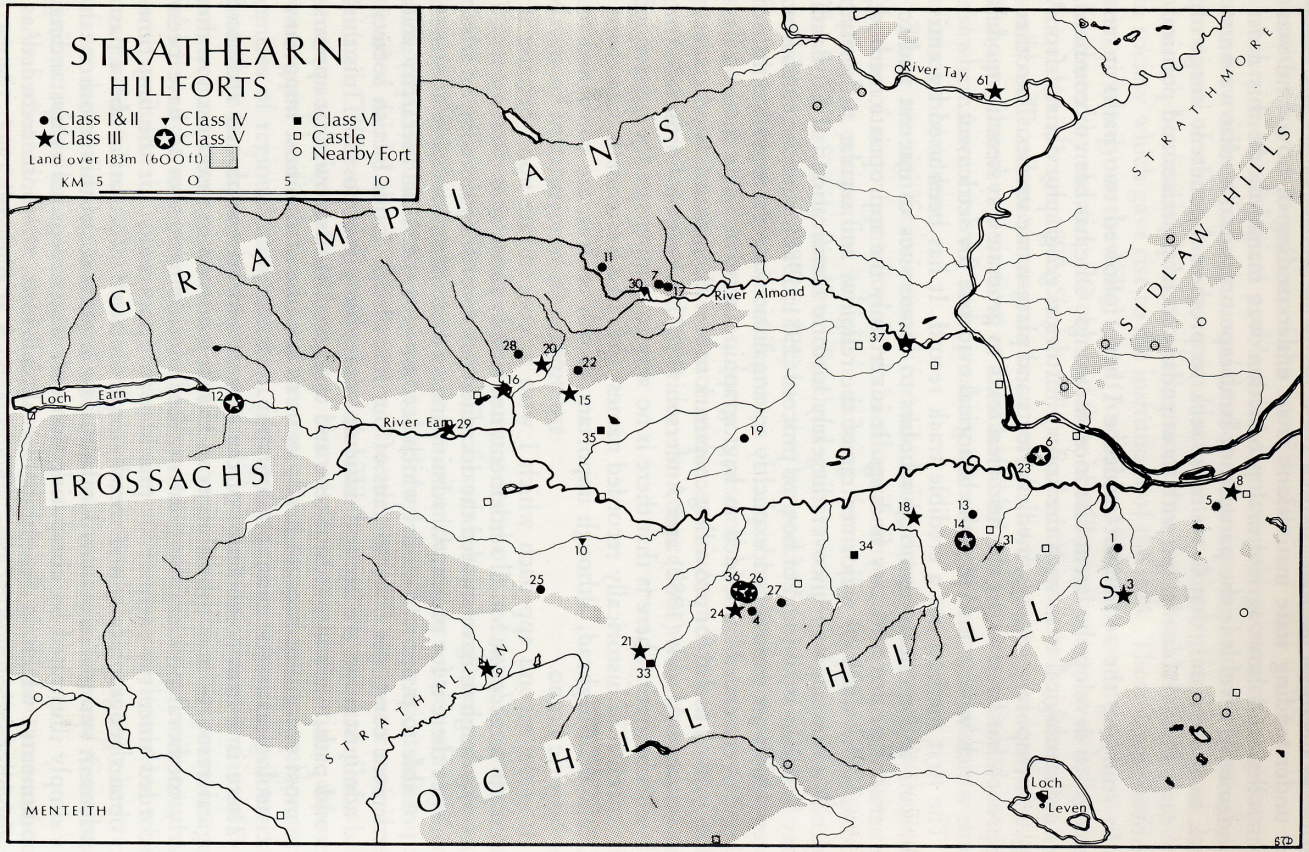


Fig. 5.1 Location map of upstanding hill-forts in Strathearn

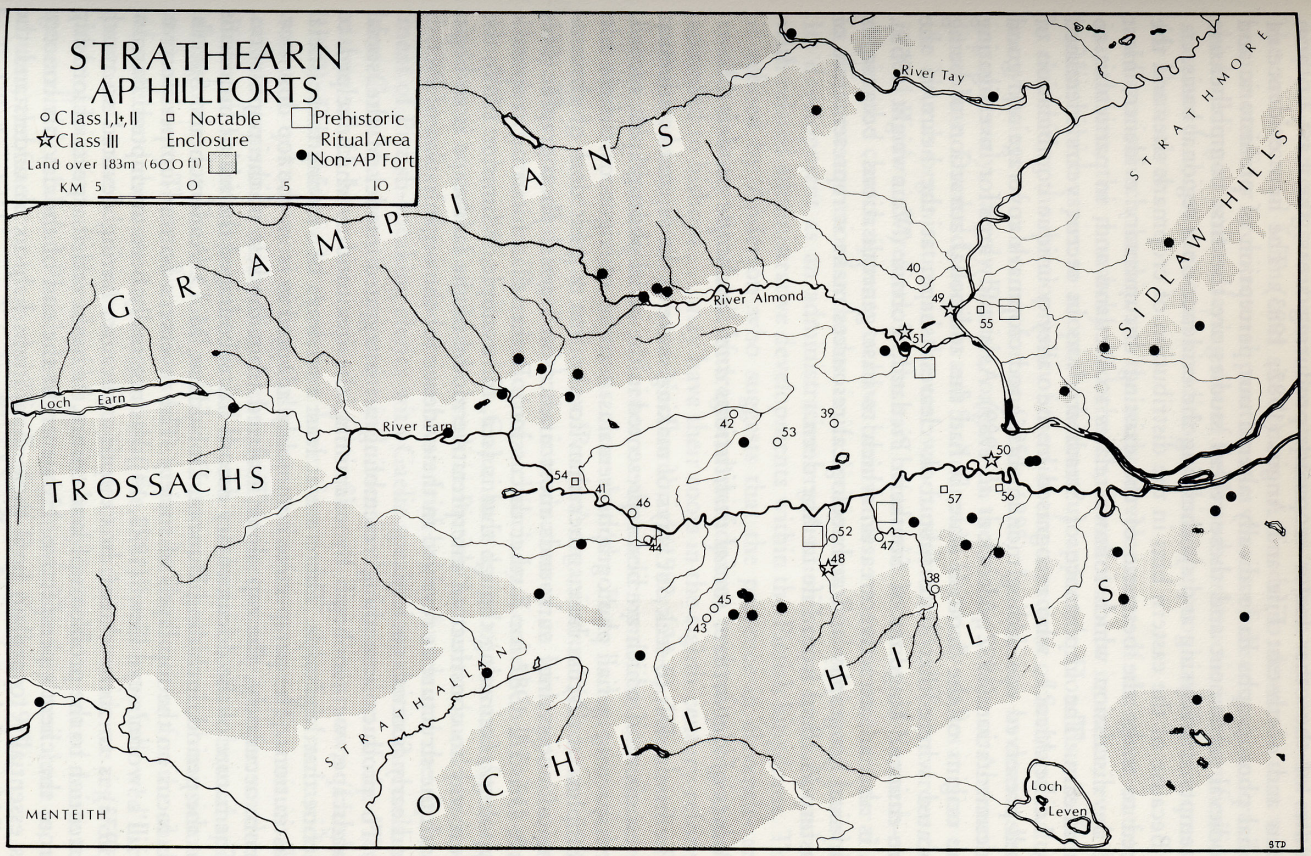


Fig. 5.2 Location map of hillforts and centres of prehistoric ritual monuments in Strathearn recorded by aerial photography (up to 1984)

studies of the other major cropmark producing areas, the East Lothian plain and north-east Fife and Angus (1982; 1983). The new evidence of aerial photographs has radically altered our perception of prehistoric and medieval settlement and these recent studies are the first comprehensive attempts at analysing and synthesising the evidence on a regional basis.

Because of the eastern bias in the distribution of cropmark sites and the need to make the best use of the existing documentary evidence, most of the discussion which follows relates to Pictland and, in particular, to Strathearn. The importance of Strathearn was in recent years identified by Leslie Alcock, who recognised in the valley a unique combination of well preserved upstanding monuments, good cropmark coverage and good documentation (1982; Alcock *et al.* 1989). As a study area for investigating the origins of the Scottish state, it had the additional attraction of being located where that state first took clearest shape: at the heart of the pre-eminent kingdom of Southern Pictland, Fortriu (Wainwright 1955). It is also an attractive area on which to base generalisations, because its physical geography and archaeological resources make it representative of eastern Pictland from Fife to Aberdeen.

Points of departure: social institutions and landscape models

The first task is to seek out ways of making sense of the separate settlement sites, many of which are best represented in the aerial photographic record. Interpreting aerial photographs remains a topic of vigorous debate too complex to discuss here, other than to say that a great deal of chronological uncertainty surrounds most unexcavated aerial photographic sites (see Driscoll 1987 for further discussion). Rather than focus on cropmark typology, facinating though that is (see, for example, Whimster 1989), the best way to construct an interpretative model of the landscape is to begin with the structure as revealed in the evidence for the organisation of Pictish and early Scottish society.

To produce something resembling an integrated model of the social landscape, we can begin by examining the institutions which helped to define that landscape. There are at least two ways of viewing these social institutions. The perspective commonly adopted is from the top down or, more accurately, the top alone, isolated from the rest of the population. The nature of the documentary record has encouraged the major historians of the period, including Duncan, Donaldson, M. O. Anderson and Smyth, to focus on the top levels of society. The reverse, a bottom-up perspective, Hill's 'worm's eye view' (1972, 14)) has not really been attempted. Barrow (1973) is to some extent an exception because, having devoted so much attention to the problems of land tenure, he has revealed aspects of lordship from the client's perspective. However, at the end of the day his concern is essentially to explain how these institutions help us to understand the activities of the aristocracy. By focusing attention on the archaeological evidence for settlement we may remedy this bias. This exercise should

help us to recognise better the expressions which are encoded within the architectural forms and site locations. To do so demands that we in return consider architectural practice as a means of discourse, and read in the building of houses, laying out of fields and construction of fortifications statements about the social conditions which the people of Fortriu created for themselves.

Historical scholarship on the early development of the great national institutions, the monarchy and church, is not without its value, even for studies which aspire to adopt the bottom-up approach. Donaldson's efforts at elucidating the development of the diocesan structure of Scotland include many points of relevance for us (1953; 1985). In addition to demonstrating the early, largely Pictish, origins of the bishop's sees at Abernethy, Dunblane, Dunkeld, Brechin and St Andrew's, his study makes it clear that the church organisation in the east was fundamentally different from that in Dal Riada and Ireland. In the east before the accession of Kenneth mac Alpin, the church appears to have been far less monastic in character than in the west and more orthodox in its division into bishoprics and parishes. Its development as an administrative organisation seems to be bound up with related administrative developments within the Pictish kingdoms. This is echoed by Anderson who suggests that the presence in eleventh- and twelfth-century Scotland of 'regional bishoprics, and of a high status accorded to bishops . . . may have their roots in the eighth-century reforms introduced into Pictavia from Northumbria' (1982, 128–9). Whether it was due to the Northumbrian influence or the earlier practices introduced at the time of conversion, it seems clear that 'the Picts had grown used to something more like an orthodox 'Roman' organisation' (Anderson 1982, 130). This was all changed with the introduction of an Irish-type monastic church organisation. The erection of a church by Kenneth in AD 848–9 at Dunkeld to house the relics of St. Columba is a sign of this transformation and seems to mark a significant break in Pictish/Scottish cultural history.

One result of the introduction of an Irish-style church and the replacement of Pictish-speaking clerics with Gaelic speakers was to enhance claims that Columba was an important influence in the conversion of the Picts, claims which have been repeated from Skene's day to our own (Hughes 1980). Donaldson and Anderson have shown that, although monasticism was not unknown, a strong Columban influence is not apparent in the early organisation of the Pictish church. This is especially true for southern Pictland. In this respect the Pictish church can be said to have been shaped along orthodox lines by local political concerns, rather than Irish missionary monasticism. These observations have important implications for the study of statehood, because they suggest that the church will have followed local practices in the administration of its estates and that the evidence regarding the organisation of the church's estates may provide a sound basis for generalisation about Pictish estate management. The key text here is, of course, the Gaelic notes in the *The Book of Deer* (Jackson 1972).

Similarly, the history of the Pictish monarchy suggests that stable, if antagonistic, political entities emerged at the same time as king lists,

perhaps as early as the middle of the sixth century (Anderson 1980, 139–45; Miller 1979, 11). If we are to accept Smyth's (1984) interpretations of the king lists and annals, then it appears that from the sixth century onwards several highly competitive dynastic groups from different areas of southern Pictland were grappling for the paramount kingship, which was usually based in Fortriu. Moreover, as Davies has pointed out, the reference to the death of several royal officials, described in the Annals of Ulster as *exactatores*, presumably a corruption of *exactores*, 'collectors of dues' or 'agents', suggests that by the early eighth century the 'Pictish kings were developing some real machinery of government' (1984, 70; Anderson 1980, 178).

Collectively these scattered details attest to the formation of the administrative apparatus of the medieval state. We cannot doubt that the development of these institutions had a strong impact on the organisation of society. But at the same time there exists compelling evidence that these administrative techniques grew out of pre-existing social practices. We will come to the details of this evidence shortly, but there are also theoretical arguments supporting this notion of pre-feudal administrative structures. In essence the argument is that cultures do not work by plucking social practices out of the air for the amusement of anthropologists; there must always be reference to what has gone before. It is this recursive property of culture that encourages us to postulate the antiquity of some of the institutions which we only begin to see clearly in the twelfth century.

The most fundamental of these institutions was the administrative structure known as a thanage, which, as its name suggests, was managed by a thane, a royal official appointed to look after the scattered royal holdings. The so-called small shire was an equivalent in terms of internal organisation to the thanage, but was not held by a royal official. The important thing, as Barrow explains (1973), is that, despite the first historical emergence of the thanage into the documentation of the twelfth century and its Anglo-Saxon terminology, its origins lie in the traditional obligations of lordship or clientage. These grew up around the small 'tribal kingdoms' and ultimately have their origins in kin-based organisations. It is here with the lord — client relationship that any attempt to write history from the bottom up must begin, and it is in these traditional obligations of clientage that we must ultimately seek our explanations of the settlement system.

Social transactions

The order and coherence evident in the twelfth century *notitiae* in the *Book of Deer* provide us with confidence in the existence of Pictish institutions of clientage and associated landholding practices (Driscoll 1987, 260–74), but it is from other less unified or systematic sources that we learn the more specific details of the Pictish social order and its reproduction. To summarise arguments drawn from anthropology and sociology which are detailed elsewhere (Driscoll 1987): the tenure of land does not in itself

confer permanent rank or social position. Within any society position and status are the result of continual negotiations and interactions among its members, some of which focus on control of land. It frequently transpires that specific social transactions become institutionalised and assume an added importance beyond the immediate value of the goods or services or words exchanged. Such transactions come to symbolise the relationship itself. It is these sorts of transactions which enter into the historical record because of their implicit meanings of fealty and loyalty, or, when they were violated, of treachery. At first sight, it may seem that the rendering of food or the performance of military service are too 'practical' or too 'functional' to carry meaning beyond the self-evident. However, as Jaques Le Goff has shown us (1980), in the early middle ages it was from the repertoire of the common-place and the routine that acts of particular symbolic significance emerged, and part of their efficacy comes precisely from their simple fundamental origins.

In medieval Scotland we may identify significant social transactions in several areas. There are acts performed by dependants for their superiors and a reciprocal set of acts performed by the superiors. These acts may involve either the exchange of material goods or of services. As the law tracts from Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England make plain, the acts and the goods appropriate to a specific relationship were sharply defined and were not interchangeable.

The main material obligations of dependent participants in the social contract are the provision for their superiors of *cain* (agricultural products) and *conveth* (hospitality). Barrow was not the first to identify the similarities between early Scottish institutions and those found in Northumbria and Ireland (1973), but his reading of them is important because it appears to take the traditional Scottish obligations of food render and labour services back into the Pictish era. It should be noted that he is cautious in attributing specific developments to the Pictish period, but it is impossible to conclude that he does not believe in a strong Pictish influence in these developments.

Social relations and settlement organisation

That a connection between social relations and settlement organisation existed cannot be questioned; what is at issue are the details of the relationship. One of the underlying assumptions I have followed is that the imposition of spatial order on the landscape is a dimension of social reproduction, that is a way of maintaining and regenerating social practices. Further the principal relationships — whether kin-based or client-based — involved undertaking reciprocal obligations, many of which focused ultimately on aspects of agricultural production. The foremost forces shaping the settlement systems were, then, of an agricultural nature. We must, therefore, expect to find within the settlement patterns, systems designed to control and maintain these fundamental relations of production. Given our relative

ignorance of the details of early medieval agriculture, this must be regarded as a priority area for research.

Certainly the most common figure in the landscape was the least prominent historically or archaeologically. It was the person whose labour contributed the most to the production of food and raw materials, and who may be described as the unfree 'dependant' of a lord. There is no way of telling how large a proportion of the population such individuals constituted, nor of assessing what degree of economic and social freedom they enjoyed. However, we may suppose that they constituted a substantial majority, and that throughout our period their numbers were increasing as population grew and the middle strata of society shrunk with the growth of the dynastic magnates. Whether they were tied to the land, in the sense that serfs were, is a moot point since the identification of the kindred with particular tracts of land, and the lack of a land market, will have enforced residential stability. There are, however, signs from elsewhere in Britain that, in certain circumstances, people could be bound to the land as in seventh-century Wessex (Charles-Edwards 1976, 186) and similarly in early medieval Wales (Davies 1982, 68). Such a situation may have prevailed in Pictland, and certainly by the twelfth century we hear of men who were bound to the land in Fife (Barrow 1981a, 17).

To ask where these people lived starts to return us to the archaeology, because it requires that we look at the ground. Presumably they lived upon the estates of the nobility or on something akin to later townlands, which were operated by the free commoners. The distinction between an estate and a townland arrangement is probably not one we should press too far in our period, since any tenants were likely to be of the same kin-group or lineage as their immediate lord (Driscoll 1987, 50–144). Nonetheless the joint tenancy farm may provide a good analogy to the ways in which tenurial obligations were satisfied at the farm level (Whittington 1973, 542). It may also provide a useful guide to earlier settlement location, much as the Irish and Anglo-Saxon literature show how tenurial arrangements were translated into living arrangements, whether extended families occupied a single farmstead or were scattered around the countryside. But in the Celtic world, with few exceptions, people did not cluster in large villages. It may be that they lived in the small houses which are adjacent to the complexes of enclosures and field systems observed in the aerial photographic record, or in the apparently isolated small unenclosed settlements possibly considered as part of the estate's appurtenances (see below the example of Easter Kinnear).

It was the social relations within the estate or township which determined the organisation of the fields. Although it is possible in specific instances (as in the example of Aberargie below) to argue that strip cultivation respects or overlies a settlement site, we are not in a position yet to generalise from aerial photographs about the origins and development of open fields.

Place-names and settlement

Place-names are the most enigmatic type of documentary evidence to handle, particularly when we move away from the security of identifying specific places (cf Alcock 1981) to assess the significance of the generic place-name elements. For the Picts the obvious place-names are those beginning with the element pit- (Wainwright 1955). The prefix pit-, which derives from the word *pett* probably meaning 'portion or piece of land', survives in over 300 places in north-east and, more rarely, northern Scotland. It has received the most attention because it is 'practically the only place-name element which can be said to be exclusively limited to the Picts' (Nicolaisen 1976, 151). Although there are at least six other P-Celtic place-names found in Pictland, none is as well studied as the pit- places.

Some of the most informative work has been done by geographers (Whittington and Soulsby 1968; Whittington 1975), who have closely analysed the physical geography of *pett* places. Their findings show a very strong preference for well sheltered, well drained locations with good loamy soils. Coastal situations and locations above 183 m OD are generally avoided by *pett* names. This has been interpreted by the geographers as avoidance of these settings by the Picts. In short 'the distribution of the pit-sites appears to agree with the distribution of the best soils in eastern Scotland; those which are best suited to agriculture' (Whittington 1975, 102). Probably, what this means is that the *pett* places were the most favoured and thus tended to survive intact, maintaining their name as well as their geographic identity.

The survival or continuity of land was one of the major themes considered by Barrow in his 1985 Rhind lectures. The implications of Barrow's work on place-names is that the linguistic survival in Strathearn of P-Celtic names like Comrie, Moncreiffe, Pitkeathy, Aberdalgie, Pitversie, Abernethy, Pitcuran and Carpow serve as an index of Pictish settlement and social continuity. Thus, while he recognises that the introduction of the Q-Celtic stratum of place-names between *c.* AD 800 and 1100 effected a quick and deep transformation in place-names, he places rather more weight on the P-Celtic place-names as a sign of stability. His avoidance of the traditional date of 843 suggests that he regards the process of Gaelicisation as a subtler, more complex process than the migrationists allow. In effect Barrow is echoing (without the migrationist slant) Jackson's recent view that the *pett* place-names:

> were formed as we have them sometime after the Gaelic settlements in Pictland in the middle of the ninth century, whether the original Pictish second elements of old *pett-* names were translated into Gaelic, or were replaced by Gaelic name-elements, or whether they were wholly new foundations of Gaelic date. In this last case, the Gaels must have adopted the unquestionably Pictish *pett* as a name forming element for their own new place-names, no doubt because it expressed some characteristic feature of Pictish land tenure foreign to them but adopted by them when they settled among the Picts. (Jackson 1980, 174)

a structural resemblance to the 'multiple estate' as described by Glanville Jones (1976; 1984). The thanes who ruled the Scottish shires resemble their English counterparts in being royal officers who, in exchange for an estate (presumably a *pett* within the shire), carried out administrative duties varying from tribute collection and military organisation to maintaining order. However, despite the Northumbrian resemblances and the English terminology, Barrow argues that these institutions — thane and shire/thanage — are English in name only and that like *davoch* they grow out of pre-Norman roots and ultimately Pictish seeds. The strongest argument supporting a Pictish origin is that based on distribution (see Muir 1975). This is, of course, Skene's argument for a Pictish origin for the thanages (1890, 242). In *Celtic Scotland* he observed that there are no thanages in the west, so it seems unlikely, to say the least, that they were introduced by the Scots. The thanages closely resemble Northumbrian shires, but the Anglo-Saxons cannot be directly responsible for their common occurrence north of the river Forth and especially north of the Tay. Therefore, they must have grown out of local political circumstances in Pictland, but not unique circumstances since similar institutions grew up in England and Wales. The shared terminology with the English, introduced perhaps in the tenth century (Barrow 1973, 64), only serves to underscore the close cultural links extending along the north-east coast of Britain.

The ideal thanage: settlement model for the state

The thanage is the earliest recognisable organisational unit below the level of kingdom that we can now detect. It gave a physical reality to the notion of a social hierarchy based upon tribute payments, and as such provided the framework for the smaller constituents of the settlement pattern. It also provided the means by which these small units became effective elements in a larger institutional structure of the state. It is, therefore, appropriate that we propose a model of the settlement system which takes account of the preceding discussion on social relations, performs the tasks needed by a state, and accommodates the archaeological evidence. Indeed, it is hoped that the model will help to frame further questions for the field archaeologist.

The ideal thanage

There can be little question that the organisation of a thanage was hierarchical and that at its heart, or rather at its head, was the principal residence of the thane or other authority. Conventionally, this principal residence is called a *caput*. We do not, of course, know that this Latin term was used of these places in early medieval Scotland, but it will be convenient for us to use

it. Although it was not necessarily a fortified stronghold, in Strathearn the best examples of a *caput*, Dundurn and Clatchard Craig, were fortified and can be recognised by the combined evidence for agricultural, military and manufacturing activities in conjunction with a noble residence. Similarly, it seems likely that several of the unexcavated forts served as the head and heart of the thanage. Indeed, the terminology can be confusing. The place-name element derived from *cather* (fort) has been used in contexts which can refer to both a secular stronghold and to a monastery (see Barrow 1973, 65–6; Jackson 1972; Driscoll 1987, 317–19). This ambiguity underscores the suggestion that the *caput* of a thanage had more in common with the great house of a large estate than with a fortified garrison, despite being frequently ensconced in ramparts.

The institution of the shire can be said to have worked on two levels. It served to define or order a territory within which were found men who owed services and tribute to a lord. At this level the shire served to integrate the interests of the primary producers and the local aristocracy (and here I am including the church as an element of the aristocracy). At another level the thanage served to articulate the interests of the local aristocracy with those of a regional or national lord. It is at this second level that the thanage has exercised the attention of most historians, and not surprisingly, since there exists ample justification for studying the thanage in terms of a proto-feudal institution. The formalisation of the social and political relations described by thanage certainly was a key step in the making of the Scottish kingdom. However, if we are interested in understanding the order behind the random scatter of settlements within the thanage, it is at the base level of local economic and social relations that the thanage must occupy our attention.

If the great residence or monastery was the head of the thanage, its body consisted of fields and farmsteads. Not only were there differences in land usage, but direct control of the land seems to have been distributed amongst various farms. The thanage was evidently made up of (or subdivided into) portions which, among other things, allowed individual farmers to pay closer attention to the farming. The portions are, of course, the *pett* places which have given us the settlements bearing pit- place-names. One conclusion to be drawn from the distribution of *pett* place-names is that this particular system of land division and management was a pervasive feature of Pictish culture, so much so that linguists should seriously consider Maxwell's suggestion that the name Pict derives from their characteristic land division the *pett* (1987, 32–3).

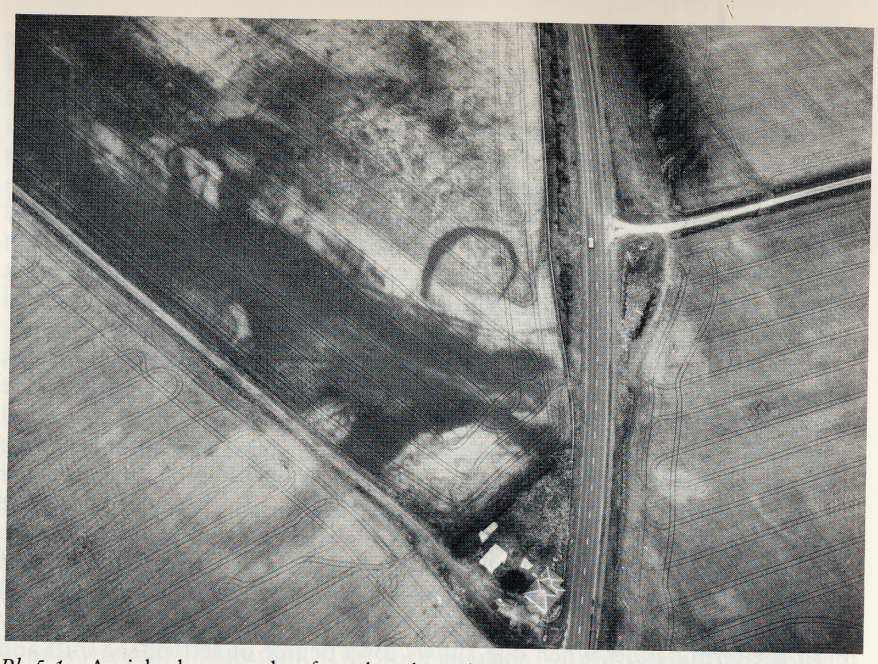
Whittington's arguments regarding the possible antiquity of joint tenancy farms are interesting in the context of modelling the workings of the *pett* (1973, 542). He has worked the model out in considerable detail on the Pitkellony estate in the ancient Muthill thanage in Strathearn (Whittington 1973, 552–67). His evidence is necessarily late, post-medieval in fact. But it is the clearest model of the spatial arrangement of infield, outfield and moorland, which should be applicable to the earliest two-field system and may be appropriate for our period. Whittington, however, makes no claims

for the antiquity of this infield – outfield model and quotes Barrow to the effect that 'there is no indication in early documents of any system of infield and outfield cultivation, although the texts are not incompatible with the existence of such a system' (1962, 127). Essentially, Whittington's model is a concentric one, with the settlement located within or at the edge of the infield core, the intensively cultivated land. This is surrounded by outfield, portions of which were cultivated in rotation, and is in turn surrounded by permanent pasture and moorland. As a starting place for appreciating a *pett* on the ground and for visualising its internal arrangements, this work on the Pitkellony estate is invaluable. Clearly, as our knowledge of medieval agriculture grows, this model will prove a useful point of comparison.

In the aerial archaeological record the most likely settlement features which might be taken to mark the principal farmstead of the *pett* are the simple ditched enclosures of which Aberargie (Plate 5.1), with its associated strip fields, and Dalpatrick (Plate 5.2), with its possible timber hall, are reminiscent of the fortified thanage *caput*. It seems clear enough that the entire population of a *pett* did not live in a nucleated settlement about the principal farmstead. It seems most likely that they inhabited small clusters of houses which might be an early fermtoun. Perhaps the best example of this is the recently excavated settlement at Easter Kinnear, Fife (Plate 5.3) (DES 1989; 1990). But even the dense cropmarks at Easter Kinnear hardly merit the term hamlet when one allows for a degree of settlement shift and rebuilding.

We can, therefore, cautiously suggest that a *pett* consisted of scattered dwellings, some of which may have been built on so slight a scale as to be scarcely visible archaeologically, as would be the case for Easter Kinnear if it were not on such a freely draining soil. It probably included at least one relatively substantial or elaborate farmstead. Given that constructing an enclosure ditch or wall is one of the few architectural techniques for aggrandising a settlement, it seems reasonable to propose that the principal settlement of a *pett* was a ringfort or in exceptional cases a more complex enclosure. However, given that ditches are about the only architectural techniques for elaborating a site which we can observe without excavation, and then only in places favourable to the production of cropmarks, this should be accepted with caution. I am proposing a model of the *pett* that is a miniature of the shire, or rather the reverse, that the shire took its form from a pre-existing structure found in the *pett*. In fact, since even places like Dundurn yield evidence of farming activities, we could consider that the thanage *caput* was a particularly successful *pett* that managed to achieve a sort of overlordship over adjacent *petts*. These were then rationalised into shires and parishes at a later date.

We are, if anything, less capable of describing those things which are thought of conventionally as composing the landscape. For instance we are unable to say what proportion of the fields was arable and what was pasture, or how much of the valley was given over to woodland. We might imagine that woods, copses and orchards, as well as stretches of permanent pasture, acted as boundaries between *petts*, but there is no



Pl. 5.1 Aerial photograph of enclosed settlement and associated strip fields at Aberargie, near Abernethy (RCAHMS)

Pl. 5.2 Aerial photograph of an enclosure with everted entrance and possible timber hall at Dalpatrick, near Strageath (RCAHMS)

supporting evidence beyond the presence of timber, wattle and fruit on a particular site, like Dundurn (Alcock *et al.* 1989). Similarly, it is likely that some sort of infield — outfield system was used with the intensively cultivated land closer to the settlements, surrounded by pasture, woods and, beyond those, common grazing. But, aside from the early documentary notices of common grazing land, the evidence is late. For what it is worth, Whittington's infield — outfield model indicates that the usual arrangement was one portion of infield to three of outfield, but since only a quarter of the outfield was likely to be under cultivation, in effect half the arable was under crop at any one time (1973, 544 and 551). In addition to this there was considerable permanent pasture. We can go on to suggest that at higher elevations a greater portion of the land was given over to pasture. But, as with the structure of the *pett*, most of this is informed speculation. The only

Pl. 5.3 Excavation photograph of some of the scooped houses in the unenclosed settlement at Hawkhill, Easter Kinnear, which were revealed by aerial photography (RCAHMS)

comfort to take from this is that the situation will certainly improve as more palaeobotanical work is done on sites of later prehistoric to medieval date.

The third principal component of a thanage is more difficult to establish since it was not directly related to agriculture or settlement, but seems to have been a focal point for shire administration as well as being significant in the formation of the identity of the shire. I am referring to those ceremonial centres which served as meeting places, the place to hold popular courts and the sites of quasi-religious inagurations to high office. The prime example of this is, of course, Moot Hill at Scone. But there are good reasons to believe that, while this mound was pre-eminent, it was not unique. In fact, to judge from regional studies, it seems that court hills or meeting places were a common feature of the political landscape of early medieval Britain and Ireland, suggesting that every autonomous political entity possessed one. As the political scene gradually came to be dominated by fewer and fewer kingdoms, so it seems that the meeting places of particular dynasties came to prominence, like Scone, while the majority slipped into obscurity. The majority of lesser meeting places must have continued to function at a local level for some time, since they do manage to survive in oral tradition late enough to be recorded. For instance, Watson quotes the *Old Statistical Account* regarding the survival of one such meeting place: 'there is a large artificial mound of earth, where in ancient times courts were held; near to which the Duke (or rather Mormaer) of Lennox had a place of residence' (1926, 223). The residence survives as Catter (from *cathir*) near Kilmarnock, and Watson identified the meeting place with a reference in a charter to *forcas nostras de Cather*, 'our gallows of Cather' (1926, 223). This use of a meeting place as the later location of a gallows appears to be a widespread practice.

There has been no systematic survey of the evidence for these sites in Scotland, but Barrow has looked in detail at one of the place-name elements which he believes indicates the location of popular courts in early medieval Scotland (1981b). The place-name generally survives in modern usage as cuthill or a variation of this; its suggested etymology is from Gaelic *Comhdhail* (Old Irish, *comdal*), 'assembly', 'meeting', 'conference', 'tryst' (Barrow 1981b, 3). The distribution of these places complements that of the thanage, and indeed of pit- place-names, although it is less common than either. Barrow's observations about the geographical situation of these sites is of particular interest:

> That the meeting-places indicated — if, indeed, they are indicated — by the cuthill element had an antiquity comparable with the hundred, small shire and wapentake meeting places in England is strongly suggested by their geographical association, in an appreciable number of cases, with major pre-historic monuments, especially cairns, stone-circles and standing stones. Moreover, in the case of [seven examples given] the cuthill name is associated with the holding of courts and with punishment. (Barrow 1981b, 10)

There are no cuthill names in Strathearn, but this association of meeting places with prehistoric monuments is of some significance for any attempts

to ascertain the significance of ancient monuments in Early Historic times. That they were actively used is hinted at by the presence of Christian graves in the North Mains of Strathallan henge monument and is implied by the intermingling of square barrows with prehistoric monuments at Forteviot. We might also cite the significant cropmark complex composed of prehistoric monuments at Blairhall near Scone. Elsewhere in Scotland the survey of Mid-Argyll by Campbell and Sandeman revealed a dozen cases which could be supported by references of varying degrees of antiquity and credibility (1962, 89–91).

This scatter of examples forms a backdrop for the arguments that Dunadd was one of the major meeting places in Dal Riada which saw royal inaugurations (Thomas 1879). The close physical association between the royal residence and such meeting places is important, but we should perhaps play down the royal aspect in favour of noting their ubiquity and local importance. Although it seems that prehistoric burial mounds were on occasion used as meeting places, they were clearly purpose-built at Catter and Clougher, Co. Tyrone (Warner 1988), and also, it would seem, by the Anglo-Saxons (Adkins and Petchley 1984). In this context, it is perhaps worth questioning the Ordnance Survey field officers' conclusions that the Moot Hill at Scone was a natural and not an artificial mound (OS record card).

In our study area, there is a conjunction between the presence of prehistoric ritual monuments, royal residences and major meeting places in two locations. Whether this should be taken as a general pattern is too soon to say, but it may prove a useful rule of thumb, since otherwise these meeting mounds would be impossible to distinguish from a burial mound without excavation. That they formed a key element of the thanage seems plain enough: the administrative duties of the lord of the shire will have demanded such a facility.

To sum up, the model thanage included: a *caput*, possibly fortified, a number of *pett* elements, and a meeting place or ceremonial centre. With this hypothetical framework in mind, we can now examine the archaeology of specific thanages in Strathearn.

The archaeology of thanages

It will be clear from the preceding discussions that the most influential recent study of the pre-feudal shires and thanes of Scotland is the long essay published by Barrow in 1973. In that essay he had frequent occasion to discuss places in Strathearn, because he made heavy use of the charters compiled in the *Inchaffray Liber* and the *Lindores Chartulary*. A notable feature of that paper was the presentation of reconstructions of 'conjectural shires', three of which are in Strathearn. These maps appear to have been intended primarily to illustrate the extent and composition of a pre-feudal thanage. Without knowing how they were compiled — Barrow does not describe his methodology — it is difficult to assess the exact historical

intentions behind the maps. It looks as though Barrow has culled the place-names from the charters and other more recent sources and placed them within the modern parish boundaries with little or no modification. It is important to note that Barrow makes no claims for the historical precision of the maps and, indeed, only refers to them in passing. Nor does he use this geographical information to construct any specific arguments about the nature of the thanage. The maps provide illustrative support for the verbal argument. Nonetheless one is bound to feel that Barrow would not have bothered presenting the maps if he did not think them a valid representation of a pre-feudal shire.

A minority of the places included on the maps has contemporary medieval references, but the remainder, we must assume, have been included for good linguistic reasons. Likewise we must accept the implicit assumptions that the modern parish boundaries are in reasonable agreement with the charter evidence. Given that parishes in Scotland began to adopt their current shape by the twelfth century at the latest, this seems acceptable. There is a further assumption that, in the case of the old unchanged parishes, like Muthill, the thanage boundaries coincided. Indeed, elsewhere Barrow has pointed to the continued existence of Clackmannan and Kinross as evidence of the resilience and longevity of the thanage as an administrative unit (1981a, 16–17). For these reasons I have followed this method in producing maps to illustrate the thanages discussed below.

In my thesis (Driscoll 1987) I was able to consider seven thanages, the three intensively studied by Barrow — Abernethy, Muthill (Cather Mothel) and Catherlauenach — as well as the others in Strathearn at Forteviot, Dunning and Strowan, and across the Tay at Scone. Here space requires that we focus on three: Abernethy, Dunning, and Forteviot.

Abernethy

The archaeological elements of Abernethy (Fig.5.3) are well known; the remarkable round tower of tenth-century date with the symbol stone attached to it. The presence of several other fragments of Early Christian sculpture from the village is all that would be expected of an important monastery. The survival of one of its probable boundary crosses at Mugdrum is remarkable. In addition to these physical remains, relatively early references to the territorial extent of Abernethy survive (Anderson 1980, 95), but these are vague and, in any case, are much more restricted than Barrow's conjectural shire. The *caput* of Abernethy must have been the religious house for which there is so much archaeological and historical evidence, but if Barrow's reconstruction is correct Clatchard Craig also fell within the shire.

There is good reason to believe that the two sites were occupied contemporaneously, although Abernethy certainly lasted longer. It may be that the religious house gradually made the fort redundant, or it may be that the fort survived through to the end of our period; the dating evidence is inconclusive on this point. However that may be, it is certainly the case that

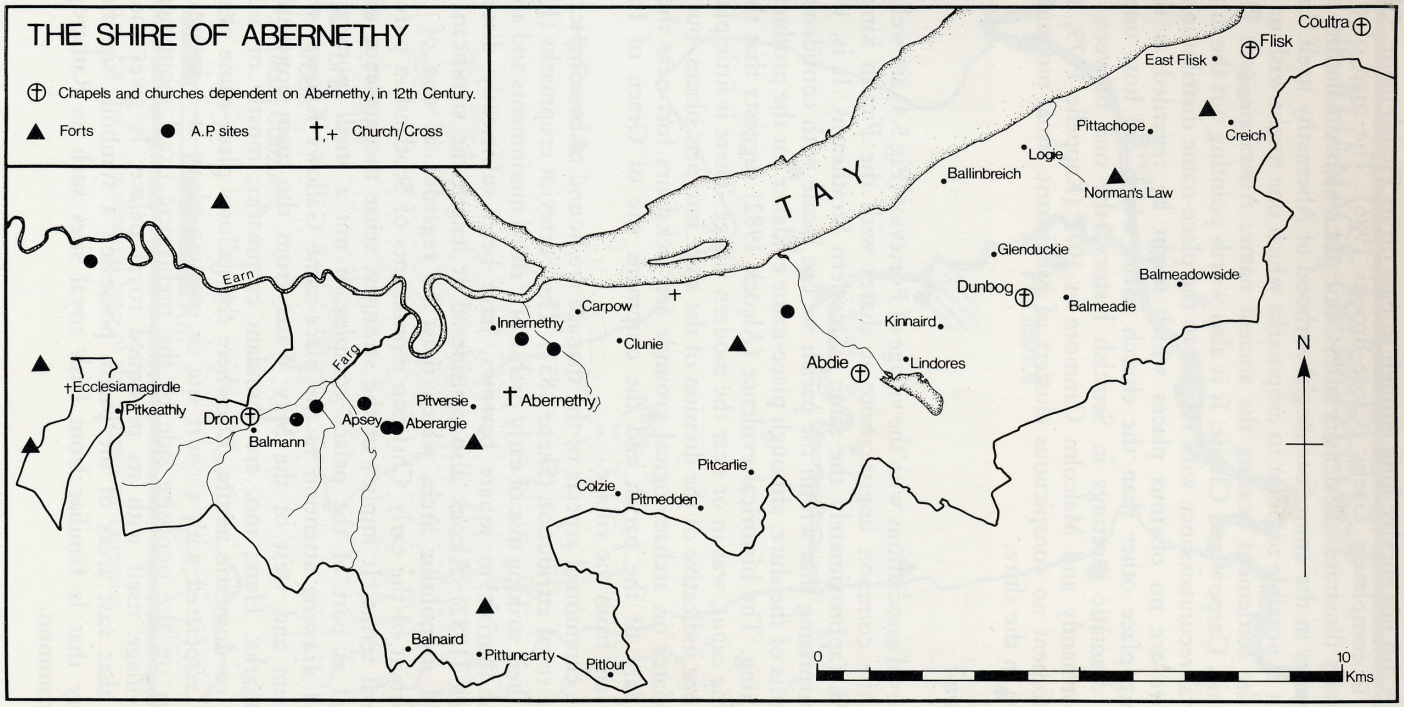


Fig. 5.3 Conjectural map of the shire of Abernethy

the fort did not survive long enough to pass on its Pictish name; Clatchard Craig is completely Gaelic (Close-Brooks 1986). The map of the shire effectively illustrates the density of P-Celtic place-names including the eight *pett* names in the immediate neighbourhood of Abernethy itself. In several cases it is possible to point to cropmarks which one might wish to identify with the settlement bearing the ancient name: Aberargie, (see Plate 5.1) Balgonie, Carpow and Clunie. It is also worth pointing out the limitations of aerial reconnaissance with respect to the place-name distribution.

There are no obvious places which might be regarded as the shire meeting place other than the church itself, which did host one of the more dramatic meetings in Scottish history, the one between William of Normandy and Malcolm Canmore in 1072 (Kappelle 1979, 139). At the moment no conspicuous clusters of prehistoric ritual monuments are known in the shire.

Forteviot

The royal associations with the village of Forteviot (Fig.5.4) are well known, as is the common lingistic root it shares with the Pictish kingdom of Fortriu (approximately the same as modern Strathearn). It is, therefore, not surprising that within the parish we can locate with confidence all the elements of the shire, although place-name evidence for the productive sites is lacking. The historical evidence (Alcock 1982) suggests that the palace site, the *caput*, was in or near the modern village. There is little place-name evidence indicative of the division of the shire into *pett* places, but the best candidates on archaeological grounds are Jackshairs fort near the eastern boundary of the parish and the cropmark site of Green of Invermay, upstream from the village.

The ceremonial aspects of the thanage are bound to be complex because of the royal attribution (Skene 1857). The Forteviot cropmarks (Plate 5.4), with their striking mix of early prehistoric ritual monuments and apparently Pictish burials in square barrows, have been sufficiently discussed by Alcock (1982). Alcock also considered at length the significance of the carved monolithic arch, which must be regarded as one of the most important of the early Christian monuments of Scotland in purely architectural terms. It implies in the strongest sense the presence of a royal chapel as part of the palace complex, if not a small monastery. It is worth drawing attention to the place-name Gallows Knowe, which lies upsteam and west of the May Water from the main concentration of cropmarks. Here, too, are abundant cropmarks, mostly of an agricultural or domestic nature. Elsewhere the gallows place-name element has been associated with a court site or meeting place. It is interesting that it lies on the opposite side of the prehistoric ritual monuments from the village itself with its presumed royal palace. It gives the impression that vast areas of the parish possessed a symbolic significance, in a way that is familiar from Irish royal sites such as Rathcrogan, Co. Roscommon.

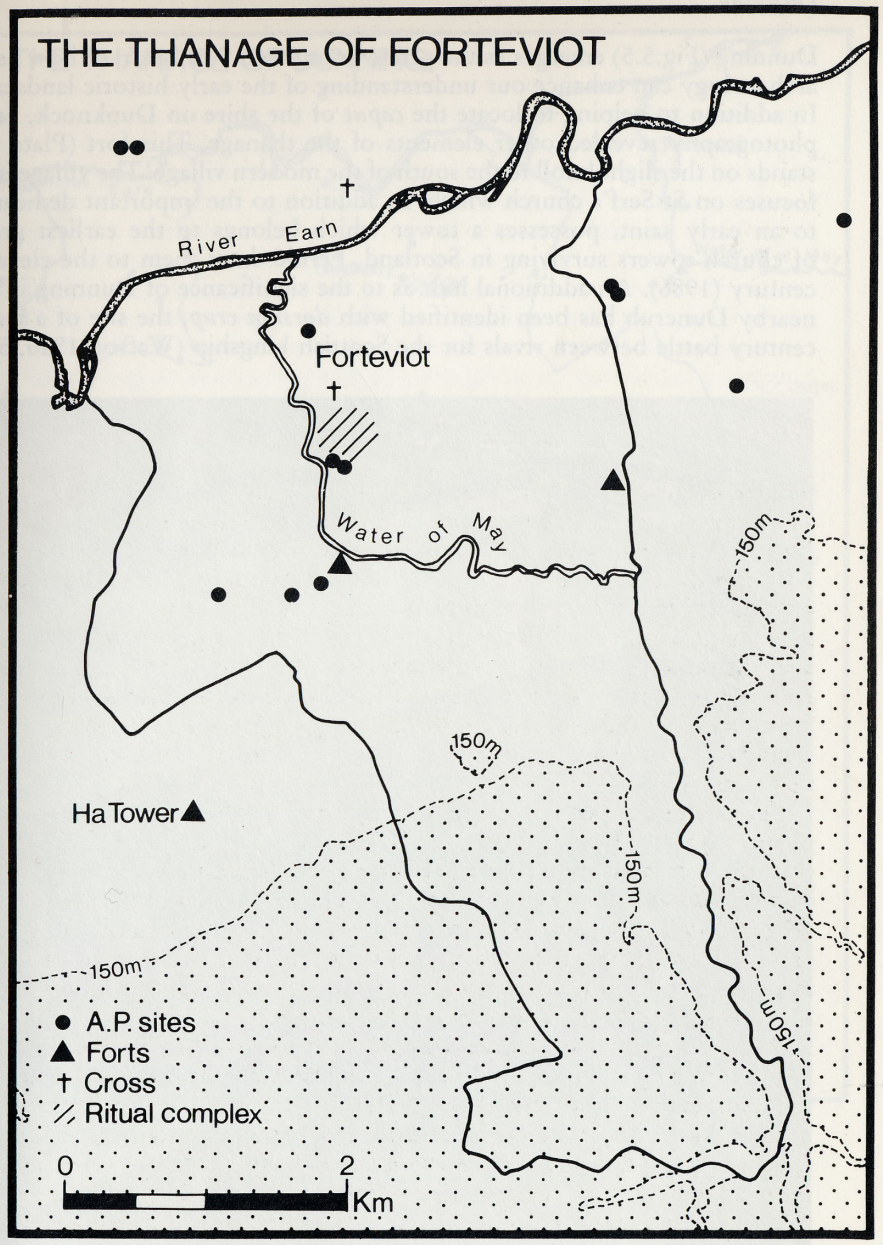


Fig. 5.4 Conjectural map of the thanage of Forteviot

Dunning

Dunning (Fig.5.5) emerges as the prime example in Strathearn of how aerial archaeology can enhance our understanding of the early historic landscape. In addition to helping to locate the *caput* of the shire on Dunknock, aerial photography revealed other elements of the thanage. This fort (Plate 5.5) stands on the slight knoll to the south of the modern village. The village itself focuses on St Serf's church which, in addition to the important dedication to an early saint, possesses a tower which belongs to the earliest group of church towers surviving in Scotland. Fernie dates them to the eleventh century (1986). An additional hint as to the significance of Dunning is that nearby Duncrub has been identified with *dorsum crup*, the site of a tenth-century battle between rivals for the Scottish kingship (Watson 1926, 56).

Pl. 5.4 Aerial photograph of prehistoric ritual monuments at Forteviot with the village and the supposed site of the palace in the background (RCAHMS)

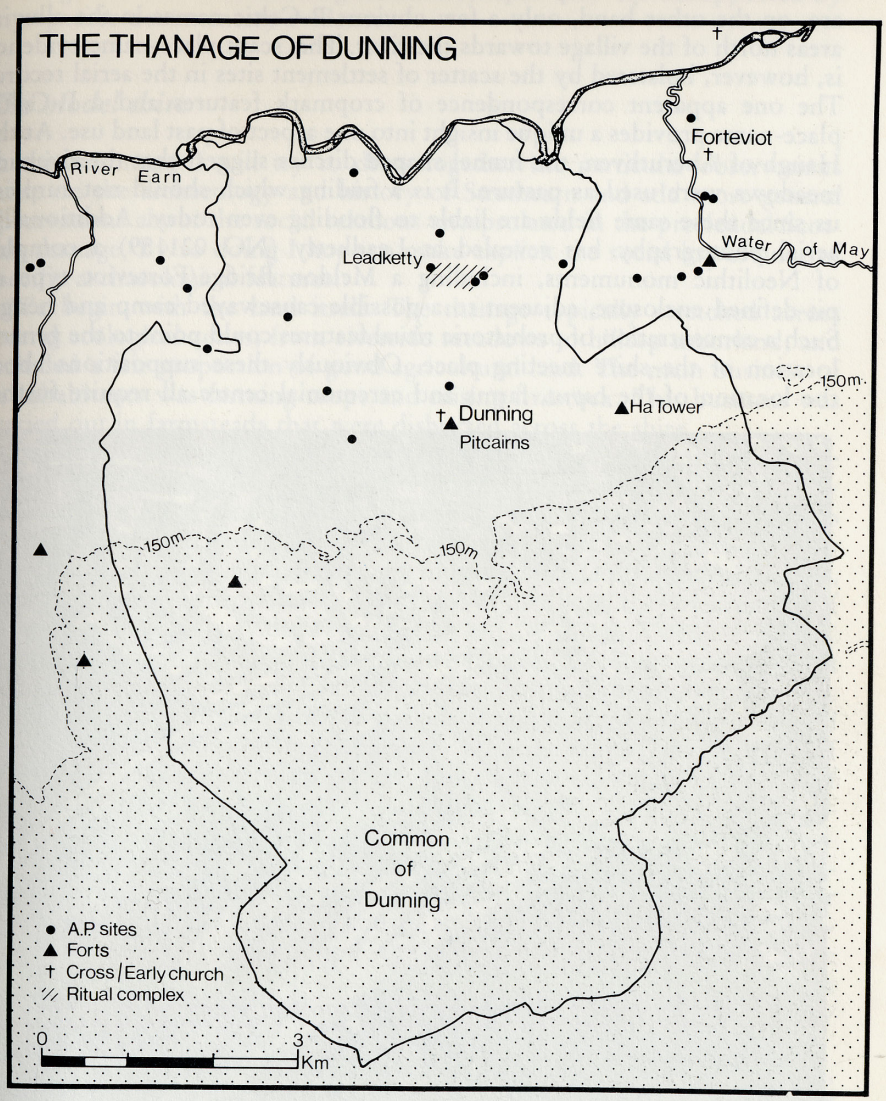


Fig. 5.5 Conjectural map of the thanage of Dunning

As at Abernethy, the *pett* places extend southwards into the hills. There are, on the other hand, only a few obvious P-Celtic names in the alluvial areas north of the village towards the river. This scant place-name evidence is, however, bolstered by the scatter of settlement sites in the aerial record. The one apparent correspondence of cropmark features and a P-Celtic place-name provides a unique insight into one aspect of past land use. At the Haugh of Aberuthven, the funnel shaped ditches suggest that the riverside meadows were used as pasture. It is a finding which should not surprise us since these same fields are liable to flooding even today. Additionally, aerial photography has revealed at Leadketty (NO 021159) a complex of Neolithic monuments, including a Meldon Bridge/Forteviot type of pit-defined enclosure, adjacent to a possible causewayed camp and henge. Such a concentration of prehistoric ritual features could point to the general location of the shire meeting place. Obviously these suppositions about the location of the *caput*, farms and ceremonial centre all require further

Pl. 5.5 Aerial photograph of the hillfort on Dunknock looking towards St. Serf's church in the centre of Dunning (RCAHMS)

investigations of an archaeological nature, since they are unsupported by any specific documentary evidence.

The model shire

In this summary I will try to draw together the particular observations made on the archaeology and history of Strathearn and add more general observations about the social relations encapsulated in the pre-feudal Scottish thanage. By so doing I hope to make explicit the social importance of specific archaeological features.

We begin with the land itself. The thanage typically stretched across several ecological zones, from riverside meadows to hilltop moorland, and included a fair proportion of good agricultural land. The main business of its inhabitants was farming crops and raising livestock. This business was carried out in farmsteads that were disbursed across the shire.

Three broad social levels of settlement may be distinguished in the archaeological record. In population terms the most common were certainly the dependent commoners; archaeologically their presence is hardest to detect. We may attribute to them the small unenclosed settlements. In many cases it is likely that their houses were too flimsy to detect archaeologically, although their handiwork in the laying out of fields and the construction of the lord's ramparts is evident enough.

The free farmer, to whom the dependent farmers probably owed food rent and services, occupied major farmsteads, some of which were termed *pett*. Archaeologically these are likely to include some of the smaller enclosed farmsteads which survive predominantly as cropmarks. The occupants of these more elaborate structures may have included minor members of the nobility or at least those who served as the heads of their kin-group.

The *caput* of the shire could assume several forms. The most common was the small hill-fort with several closely spaced ramparts. Other possibilities included religious houses and, rarely, unenclosed royal palaces. The principal authority of the shire will have assumed the type of residence appropriate to his social affiliation. Not surprisingly this last level is the best represented in the archaeological and documentary record.

The non-residential infrastructure of the thanage included, of course, fields and corrals, fences and walls, orchards and woods, but of their precise form we can say little. The most important and probably the least understood non-residential component of the thanage was the meeting place, the place where court could be held, and where the local lord may have been inaugurated. The meeting place seems to have been marked by a small mound and also seems to have been preferentially located near areas of ancient ritual activity, places where prehistoric monuments tend to cluster. This hints at a pre-Christian religious aspect of the meeting place as an important centre for focusing local group identity.

Historical implications of the model

Throughout this paper I have stressed that it is concerned with the historical development of the Scottish state as revealed primarily in Strathearn. The results presented here are hardly conclusive, yet even at this premature stage it is worth suggesting how some of the observations can be used to further research into the development of the Scottish state.

The origins of the pre-feudal shire can be seen more clearly to have Pictish roots, although it is not yet clear how coherent our putative Pictish shires were. A coordinated effort to investigate the evidence of a well-documented shire by both archaeologists and historians would probably be fruitful in helping to identify origins. The archaeological identification of a social institution like a shire presents a real challenge, but it is possible if attention is focused on agricultural evidence and indications of the local circulation of high quality craft goods, such as might be produced under the lord's patronage.

The identification of origins is of little value if it is divorced from attempts to understand the social processes involved in the development of the thanage. These focus on the subordination of kinship to clientage, or family to fealty. There can be little doubt that important social changes occurred as the political arena in which the lords of Strathearn found themselves evolved — from Fortriu, to southern Pictland, to Scotland. I have described elsewhere the construction of administrative networks with increasing disregard for kinship relations as characteristic of the development of states (Driscoll 1988b). In that paper I sought to link that social development with the Pictish symbol stones; here I have drawn attention to the shire and its attendant features. I believe the two phenomena to be related, but can only support the suggestion with the observation that both features developed in east central Scotland at roughly the same time and both would fit nicely with certain ideas about the origin of the thanage. These ideas emerged from this work, but are somewhat hypothetical and should probably be regarded as a 'working model', subject to revision and refinement.

We can start from the supposition that the thanage represents the vestiges of an archaic tribal entity comparable to the Irish *tuath* and that, like the Irish tribes, these Pictish tribes competed amongst one another for overlordship. By the time the historical curtain opens on Pictland, Strathearn is the polity of Fortriu, which we may suppose was made up of numerous tribes, a few of which were sufficiently strong to contest the kingship. Political entities the size of Fortriu are probably at the upper size limit of what may be ruled by political networks based exclusively on kinship; any bigger and new administrative techniques are required. By the time the kings of Fortriu begin participating in the overkingship of Southern Pictland, they seem to have developed some of the administrative rudiments of statehood. I have mentioned the evidence for this — the existence of royal officials and the close interrelationship between the ecclesiastical officials and royalty — at various points. One

strength of this scenario is that the origins of the administrative structure of thanages need not be seen as a 'primitive' model of Mediterranean state bureaucracy. Rather, there is every indication that it was modelled on the relations of clientship which were, in turn, the outgrowth of kin dominated political structures.

I began this paper by suggesting that archaeology had a role to play in examining the origins of the Scottish medieval state. In the course of it I hope I have shown that archaeologists are in a position to participate actively in these debates which are so fundamental to Scottish History. I have endeavoured to show how archaeologists can engage in discussions of issues like the formation of the Scottish identity not only from the perspective of the texts, but through a broader examination, involving archaeology, of the construction and maintenance of the social forms which developed into the medieval state.

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